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HISTORY OF THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHAPLAIN  
DURING WORLD WAR II

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During World War II, three Eastern Orthodox Chaplains served in the United States Army, and one Eastern Orthodox Chaplain served in the United States Navy. The purpose of this paper is to present a history of the Eastern Orthodox Chaplaincy in the United States Army during World War II. It will focus on the traditional ministry, specialized ministry, and miscellaneous duties of the Eastern Orthodox Chaplain as well as the procurement of ecclesiastical equipment and supplies.

While much is known about the ministry of chaplains from the initial organization of the corps, during the Pre-Revolutionary War Era to the present day, the student of chaplain history is not familiar with the names of Borichevsky, Kovaoh, Kivko, and Senlavsky. This aspect of the chaplaincy has been lacking, and this paper is but a minute attempt to provide information on the inception of the Eastern Orthodox Chaplaincy.

It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive or comprehensive dissertation on the entire subject of the early years of the Eastern Orthodox Chaplaincy in the United States Army. Rather it is an integration of some of the main aspects of the Eastern Orthodox Chaplaincy that is of

interest in some of the more readily available resources and a look at the ministry of the Eastern Orthodox Chaplain in the Army during World War II.

In June 1940, the Chief of Chaplains Office of the United States Army wrote to the Hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church (now the Orthodox Church in America) and of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese requesting the appointment of an ecclesiastical representative for the respective churches. A letter sent to Metropolitan Theophilus, ruling Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, states:

"It has come to the attention of the Chief of Chaplains, United States Army, that the two largest bodies of the Eastern or Greek Orthodox Church in our country, namely, the Russian Orthodox and the Greek Orthodox Churches, are not represented among those denominations which have authorized officials or committees who are empowered to give ecclesiastical indorsement to ordained representatives of their respective bodies seeking appointment as chaplains in the Officers Reserve Corps, Army of the United States.

It appears, since the two churches mentioned include in their membership a considerable segment of our national populations, that in a general mobilization a large number of Orthodox communicants will be in the Army, sufficient to warrant even though necessarily scattered, representation by their clergy in the Chaplain Corps.....

Should your body desire to designate such a representative, the Chief of Chaplains will be glad to make suitable recommendations to the War Department for the proper recognition of your denomination in this regard..." 1

A similar letter was received by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese.

Metropolitan Theophilus of the Russian Orthodox Church had appointed the Very Reverend John Telep as the ecclesiastical representative for that religious body.<sup>2</sup>

Continued correspondence transpired between the Chief of Chaplain's

Office and the ecclesiastical representatives/Hierarchs of the Orthodox Churches concerning the appointment and commissioning of an Orthodox Chaplain.<sup>3</sup>

In January 1942, Chaplain Arnold wrote that he was undertaking efforts necessary to learn the approximate number of Orthodox personnel in the Army, where the greatest need for an Orthodox Chaplain would be. Based on the collected data, he would consider the application of an Orthodox Priest.<sup>4</sup>

In October 1942, His Grace, Bishop Benjamin of the Pittsburgh Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church made a request to visit the war camps with the intention of holding services and to make an inquiry as to the needs of the Eastern Orthodox personnel in the Armed Forces.<sup>5</sup> In response, Chaplain Arnold wrote that he was grateful to receive such a request. In a letter to Reverend Peter M. Kreta, Diocesan Councillor, Chaplain Arnold wrote:

"I am very happy to know that Bishop Benjamin plans to visit some of the camps....the following camps may be worth a visit... Indiantown Gap Military Reservation, Penna.,...Ft. George Mead, MD.,...Ft. Belvoir, VA.,...Ft. Lee, VA.,...Camp Pickett, VA.,... FT. Bragg, NC.,...FT Jackson, SC.,...I would appreciate a report of his observation..."<sup>6</sup>

In May 1943, V. Rev. John Telep visited Fort Dix, Fort Monmouth, and Camp Kilmer, New Jersey.<sup>7</sup> In June 1943, Very Reverend Vladimir Lilikovich of Olyphant, Pennsylvania made a tour of Southern Installations. His itinerary included: Ft. Benning, Georgia; Fort Bragg, North Carolina; Fort Jackson, South Carolina; and a few other camps. In each case, the

civilian clergy would minister to the Eastern Orthodox personnel and conduct a survey as to where the largest Orthodox constituency was located.<sup>8</sup>

It was anticipated that through the visitations a more accurate account of statistical data of the Eastern Orthodox personnel could be obtained since many were not classified as Orthodox or others were assimilated into the P or C categories.<sup>9</sup> Many letters were written to the President of the United States and disseminated to the Chief of Chaplain's Office requesting that Orthodox personnel be classified as Orthodox rather than Protestant or Catholic and to permit Orthodox personnel to use on their identification tags the word Orthodox.<sup>10</sup>

In 1944, Chaplain Arnold wrote:

"There is no Army Regulation or War Department Circular permitting the stamping of a letter other than C, P, or H upon the identification tag. In cases involving individual preference, however, the officer or enlisted man of the Greek Orthodox faith could have the letter "O" marked on the tag if his commanding officer will approve it.

Another suggestion is that an additional tag showing his denomination might be worn by the individual in addition to his identification tag issued by the War Department. No regulation can be found that prohibits such an action."<sup>11</sup>

Since 1942, letters were received by the Chief of Chaplain's Office from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Syrian-Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese, and youth organizations of the Orthodox Church concerning the appointment of an Eastern Orthodox Chaplain to active duty.<sup>12</sup> A letter was sent also to the President of the United States of America requesting that an Orthodox priest be commissioned into

the United States Army Chaplaincy.<sup>13</sup> At the Seventeenth Annual Convention of the Federated Russian Orthodox Clubs of America, (this is one of the youth organizations of the Orthodox Church) a resolution was passed and sent to the Chief of Chaplains of the United States Army. The resolution read:

"WHEREAS, many thousands of Russian Orthodox men and women are now serving in the Armed Forces of the United States of America; and

WHEREAS, thus far there has been no allocation of Chaplains of the Russian Orthodox Church for the Armed Forces, thus depriving spiritual administration to young men and women of our church;

Be it therefore RESOLVED, That we urgently request that immediate appointment of Russian Orthodox Chaplains be made for the purpose of administering spiritually to these young men and women of our faith."<sup>14</sup>

In response to Mr. Czap, President of the Federated Russian Orthodox Clubs, Chaplain Arnold wrote:

"You will be pleased to learn that following the recent survey of certain Army stations by the Very Reverend Vladimir E. Lilikovich, we are now processing the case of one of your Russian Orthodox Priests,....for appointment as chaplain in the Army of the United States."<sup>15</sup>

In a letter to Very Reverend John Telep, the ecclesiastical representative of the Russian Orthodox Church, Chaplain Arnold writes:

"..the Reverend Vladimir Borichevsky was appointed chaplain in the Army of the United States on 18 October 1943. He had also been ordered to temporary active duty, effective 6 November 1943, as a student at the Chaplain School."<sup>16</sup>

### INITIAL COMMISSIONING

Chaplain (1LT) Vladimir S. Borichevsky was the first Eastern Orthodox Chaplain to enter the United States Army. Chaplain Borichevsky reported on active duty 6 November 1943. Upon entering the military, he received his military training at the Chaplain's Basic Course located at Harvard University. Chaplain Borichevsky was assigned to Camp Stoneman, California, upon completion of the chaplain's basic course. Subsequent assignments had him in Seattle, Los Angeles, San Francisco, at the port of embarkations, and transport duty.<sup>17</sup>

Chaplain (1LT) Michael Kovach was appointed chaplain in the Army of the United States on 16 November 1943 and entered active duty on 2 January 1944. Initially he was assigned to the Staten Island Terminal. This was his home base. Installations he served were: Brooklyn Armt Base, O Halleran Hospital, Ammo Depot in Bayonne, New Jersey, a sterilization unit that worked on ships and processing of POWS, which was accomplished at the North Terminal on the Hudson. In addition, he visited a WAC Detachment which was assigned to postal duty. Subsequent duty had him at the New York Port of Embarkation and transport duty. He attended the Chaplain's Basic Course at Harvard University also.<sup>18</sup>

Chaplain (1LT) John Kivko entered active duty January 1944. He attended the chaplain's basic course at Harvard University. He was assigned to Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia.<sup>19</sup>

### TRADITIONAL MINISTRY TO THE SOLDIERS

The Eastern Orthodox Chaplains administered effectively to the soldiers. An interview with Chaplain Borichevsky and Kovach indicate the scope of the ministry provided to the soldiers. Among the ministry they provided was: to counsel the soldiers, to make visits to the hospital and confinement facility, to co-ordinate the distinctive faith group services, to conduct classes, to respond to the letters received from concerned parents, wives/husbands, and fiances, attend staff meetings, to conduct memorial services, co-ordinated funeral details, a ministry of presence, and celebrated the Divine Liturgy and Sacraments.<sup>20</sup>

Chaplain Kovach recalls that on one occasion a tanker collided with another ship in the New York Harbor. There were many lives lost because of the accident. Chaplain Kovach was given the responsibility of co-ordinating funeral services for the victims of the accident. Also, he would become the counselor to some of the families as he provided pastoral coverage to them.<sup>21</sup>

Crisis counseling and ministry of presence were applicable and important elements. During the Battle of the Bulge, the loss of lives was tremendous. This resulted in the need of more soldiers to be sent overseas to fulfill the personnel losses. One of the companies stationed at Staten Island Terminal was prepared for overseas service. However, to some of the troops it was a shock that their unit was to be deployed. In preparation for the transition to deployment, an infiltration course was conducted near West Point. The unit would train through the infiltration course. Among the first to participate in the course and accomplish it was the unit chaplain, Chaplain Kovach.<sup>22</sup>



Besides going through the course and providing a ministry of presence with the soldiers, the chaplain had an additional case load of counseling. He provided crisis counseling concerning the anxieties and frustrations of the soldiers about the infiltration course, the impending deployment, and the war.<sup>23</sup>

#### A SPECIALIZED MINISTRY

The Eastern Orthodox Chaplain provided a specialized ministry to the Eastern Orthodox Service personnel. The chaplain celebrated the Liturgical services on Sundays. The Sacraments of the church were also administered by the chaplain. He conducted and provided for religious education through lectures, discussions and dissemination of religious literature and pamphlets, and prayerbooks. He ministered to them in the hospital, on transport ship, and at his home.<sup>24</sup>

An example of this specialized ministry was the Easter celebration held in April 1944. "At 1100, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated at Camp Stoneman, California, in the Post Chapel. Many soldiers were present, a WAC, an Ensign, several Greek and Russian (Orthodox) soldiers. Chaplain Borichevsky gave a spirited sermon...on the background of Orthodoxy and the values of church to soldiers. Those who attended had a gratifying spiritual satisfaction...After the Divine Liturgy, Matushka Mary Borichevsky, wife of Chaplain Borichevsky, prepared a traditional Paschal dinner to which all were invited....A memorable Easter was given for the group present."<sup>25</sup>

Chaplain Borichevsky has a journal which the soldiers and officers

would sign when they were guests at his home. Among those who signed the journal were: 1LT Royster, who is now one of the Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America. Also, Theodore Ball, who was a chaplain at Camp Stoneman is listed in the journal.<sup>26</sup>

Chaplain Kivko who was assigned to Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia, had on occasion provided Orthodox coverage to the Naval Base at Norfolk, Virginia. Co-ordination was made with Chaplain Claypool, the senior chaplain of the Naval Base. He offered assistance to Chaplain Kivko and co-ordinated the use of Frazier Hall for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. On a subsequent visit, Chaplain Kivko celebrated a Vesper Service at the David Adams Memorial Chapel. The Service was well attended. Chaplain Kivko continued to minister to the group spiritually.<sup>27</sup>

Other Liturgical Services and Sacraments were conducted by the chaplains. Chaplain Borichevsky served a Panakhida (memorial service) for a Greek Orthodox soldier who died of a sudden heart attack. He also celebrated the Sacrament of Marriage. On that occasion, he performed the Sacrament of Marriage for a Serbian Orthodox WAVE and a Greek Orthodox soldier. He included, at the celebration of the Divine Liturgy each week, the Litany for the dead in which he prayed for all the Orthodox servicemen who had given their lives in the war.<sup>28</sup>

#### TRANSPORT DUTY

At one point of his chaplaincy, Chaplain Borichevsky was assigned duty aboard an Army Transport as the transport chaplain. The transport sailed from Seattle to Honolulu. In Honolulu, the transport remained

in port for three weeks.<sup>29</sup>

Chaplain Borichevsky reports: "While in Honolulu, I called on the Reverend Andys, Dean, Canon of the Episcopal Cathedral...(he) made arrangements for me to hold an Orthodox Liturgy in the Chapel of the Cathedral. The Service was (publicized) in all the local Army Camps. The attendance was gratifying. The capacity of the chapel was slightly over 200 and the chapel was full. Most of those attending were servicemen. ...They were all very happy to have an opportunity to attend an Orthodox Liturgy - some of them had not been home in more than two years."<sup>30</sup>

Chaplain Borichevsky sailed from Honolulu to Saipan. The transporter went via Eniwetok. The morning following their arrival at Saipan, the Japanese made their final counterattack. Three days later the island was declared secure. The transport returned to Honolulu carrying wounded from the attack at Saipan. During the return trip he had an additional ministry to provide to the soldiers.<sup>31</sup>

Leaving Honolulu, the transporter sailed to the United States, carrying on board more wounded soldiers.<sup>32</sup> Chaplain Borichevsky had served as a transport duty chaplain on several occasions as did Chaplain Kovach.<sup>33</sup>

Chaplain Kovach served on a transporter. He served on the Borinquen and the Mahonoy City Victory. He crossed the Atlantic on several occasions. He reports that the home port was LeHavre. Additionally, his transport duty took him to Marseille and Bremerhaven. The main mission was carrying troops to the front lines and bringing back wounded.<sup>34</sup>

Further, Chaplain Borichevsky on another occasion traveled on the USAT President Tyler. It was a hospital ship. They traveled to Europe and brought back war brides.<sup>35</sup>

#### MINISTRY TO POWS

Chaplain Kivko reports that he ministered to Russian POWs. There were over 300 Russian POWs who were captured and who were held at the German Labor camps. The 300 were distributed and some of them were brought to the camp where he served as a chaplain.<sup>36</sup>

Chaplain Kivko relates: "...in my camp there are a number of Russian prisoners. You wonder where they came from. There are many Russians in German prisons. They use them for hard labor. On the day of the invasion on June 6th,.....when the Russians were building fortifications, they saw the Americans and English on the coast, threw away their shovels, and ran towards them yelling 'Russians'. Since they were in German clothes, they had to take them with the German prisoners and brought them to America. There were about 300 captured."<sup>37</sup>

"...They invited me to come and to show them what the Orthodox Services were. Out of the 17, only two remembered of ever having been to an Orthodox Church. These men were attentive to the services....Some approached me and asked if they could receive Confession and Communion....They were enthusiastic about religion and freedom in America...."<sup>38</sup>

Chaplain Borichevsky relates:"on one of the transport ships, they sailed from Los Angeles through the Panama Canal to England. On the ship, there were German POWs. A German Catholic Chaplain was one of the

POWs. Chaplain Borichevsky provided for him the necessary articles so that he could minister to the Catholic POWs. Also, a German Protestant Chaplain was a POW.<sup>39</sup>

Very Reverend Borichevsky, father of Chaplain Borichevsky, was an Orthodox Priest in Trenton, New Jersey. V. Rev. Borichevsky was called upon by the War Department to provide counseling to soldiers at Fort Dix, New Jersey and to provide ministry to the Russian POWs who were in Fort Dix, New Jersey.<sup>40</sup>

#### MISCELLANEOUS DUTIES:

In addition to providing ministry to the soldiers and family members, the Orthodox Chaplain had received other responsibilities. Chaplain Borichevsky had a bi-lingual knowledge as did the other Orthodox Chaplains. Their second language was Russian.

During World War II, the American Government was giving a U.S. Navy minesweeper to the Soviet Union. The Soviet crew arrived at Camp Stoneman. The officer in charge was Armenian and spoke very little English. Because of his knowledge of Russian, Chaplain Borichevsky was given the task of being the translator for the group. A dinner was prepared by Matushka Borichevsky in their quarters for the officer and several chaplains.<sup>41</sup>

One chaplain reported that he served as a special service officer on a transport ship. He served as a librarian and co-ordinated the showing of motion pictures aboard the ship.<sup>42</sup>

### ECCLESIASTICAL EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

The ecclesiastical vessels, literature and prayerbooks for the Eastern Orthodox were provided through private sources. It was the youth organizations of the Orthodox Church who provided the Eastern Orthodox servicemen/women with various Orthodox Prayerbooks and manuals. The Federated Russian Orthodox Clubs, a youth organization at their Sixteenth National Convention held in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1942, was briefed by their spiritual adviser, the Very Reverend Joseph Demonechek. He was compiling and editing an Orthodox prayermanual. The manual would be distributed to the men/women of the military. The booklet consisted of twenty two pages, of prayers for all occasions.<sup>43</sup>

This publication was followed by the printing of a booklet: "A Victorious Christian Soldier", which was compiled by the Very Reverend John N. Talep and the Very Reverend Peter G. Kohnanik. It contained the addresses of Orthodox Churches throughout the United States and other material.<sup>44</sup>

"The YMCA had published a prayerbook for the Eastern Orthodox servicemen. It was entitled "The Prayerbook for Eastern Orthodox Christians."<sup>45</sup>

The prayerbook contained "a short statement of the history, doctrines, and organization of the Eastern Orthodox Church, a section devoted to devotional and spiritual aids, indexing of the Feasts or Holydays, A section is devoted to prayer for preparation for confession and Holy Communion. In succeeding sections, appear the Divine Liturgy,

the Divine Liturgy, the Trisagion for the dead, and the prayer service for America at war. The book closes with the small catechism. The booklet was made available for free distribution to members of the Armed Forces by the Army and Navy Department of the YMCA, a USO Agency."<sup>46</sup>

#### EPILOGUE

The three Eastern Orthodox Chaplains in the United States Army returned to civilian parishes upon completion of their tour of duty. Each were promoted to the rank of Captain. Chaplain Seniavsky of the United States Navy completed his tour of duty. He re-entered the Navy in 1951 and eventually retired from active duty. Chaplains Borichevsky, Kovach and Seniavsky were classmates at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary and graduated together. Chaplain Kivko and Chaplain Seniavsky are deceased. Chaplain Kovach and Chaplain Borichevsky are in the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania of the Orthodox Church in America. Chaplain Kovach is the Vice President of Millersville College in Pennsylvania. Chaplain Borichevsky is the Dean of Faculty at St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary, South Canaan, Pennsylvania and the host of "The Hour of Orthodoxy" a weekly religious radio program.

Upon the departure of the three Orthodox Chaplains from the army, there would be no continuity of the Orthodox Chaplaincy in the Army until the 1960's, at which time Eastern Orthodox quotas again were being filled. Perhaps one reason for the minimal or marginally

existent references in literature given to the history of the Orthodox Chaplaincy is because of this lapse. A secondary possibility for the lack of references in pertinent literature is that the Orthodox Church was not officially recognized as a distinctive faith group in the military until 1979, even though it has always been recognized as a distinctive faith group in Christian statistical data.<sup>47</sup>

Although there are many reasons why the Eastern Orthodox Church did not have a greater representation in the Army after 1946, today there are eleven Eastern Orthodox Chaplains on active duty in the United States Army.

In conclusion, the ministry of the Eastern Orthodox chaplains during World War II was effective as they ministered to Eastern Orthodox personnel, to those of other distinctive faith groups, and to those who had no faith or religious preference. These chaplains were the forerunners and pioneers of the Orthodox Chaplaincy.



FOOTNOTES

- 1 File 080, Russian Orthodox, Letter OCCH, 11 June 1940
- 2 File 080, Russian Orthodox, Letter Metropolitan Theophilus to OCCH 16 July 1940
- 3 File 080, Russian Orthodox, and Greek Orthodox, OCCH.
- 4 File 080, Russian Orthodox, Letter OCCH to V.REV. Telep, 22 January 1942
- 5 File 080, Russian Orthodox, Letter Rev Kreta to OCCH 1 October 1942
- 6 File 080, Russian Orthodox, Letter OCCH to Rev Kreta, 6 October 1942
- 7 File 080, Russian Orthodox, Letter V. Rev. Telep to OCCH 28 July 1943
- 8 File 080, Russian Orthodox, Letter V. Rev. Telep to OCCH 28 July 1943
- 9 Records of Chaplains, Archives of the Orthodox Church in America, Letter from Rev. Telep to Metropolitan Theophilus 4 March 1943
- 10 File 080, Greek Orthodox, Letter from Metropolitan Bashir to President 1 April 1942
- 11 File 080, Greek Orthodox, Letter of OCCH 1 JULY 1944
- 12 File 080, Russian Orthodox and Greek Orthodox, OCCH
- 13 File 080, Greek Orthodox, Letter from Metropolitan Bashir to President 1 April 1942
- 14 File 080, Russian Orthodox, Letter from Ivan Czap to OCCH 8 September 1943
- 15 File 080, Russian Orthodox, Letter OCCH to Ivan Czap 15 September 1943
- 16 File 080, Russian Orthodox, OCCH to V. Rev. Telep 29 October 1943
- 17 Personal Recorded Interview with V. Rev. Borichevsky
- 18 Personal Recorded Interview with Rev. Michael Kovach
- 19 THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX JOURNAL, September 1944, p. 8
- 20 Personal Recorded Interview with Borichevsky and Kovach
- 21 Personal Interview Recorded with Rev Kovach
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.

- 24 Personal Recorded Interview Revs. Borichevsky and Kovach
- 25 SSG Joseph Krusko "Easter with Chaplain Borichevsky"  
The Russian Orthodox Journal p. 10 and 22, May 1944.
- 26 Personal Interview Recorded V. Rev Borichevsky
- 27 Y2/C Theodore D. Fryntzko "Chaplain Kivko visits Naval Base"  
p. 10, The Russian Orthodox Journal August 1944
- 28 T/5 Gregory Martusevich "The Orthodox Chaplain at Camp Stoneman"  
p. 8 The Russian Orthodox Journal December 1945
- 29 Chaplain Borichevsky Letter to the Editor, The Russian Orthodox Journal  
November 1944, p. 17
- 30 Ibid. p 17
- 31 Ibid. p 17
- 32 Ibid. p 17
- 33 Personal Recorded Interview Rev Borichevsky and Kovach
- 34 Personal Recorded Interview Kovach
- 35 Personal Recorded Interview Borichevsky
- 36 Federated Russian Orthodox Convention Proceedings, Third Day,  
2-4 September 1944. p.28
- 37 Ibid. p.28
- 38 Ibid. p. 28/29
- 39 Personal Recorded Interview V. Rev Borichevsky
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Very Rev. Daniel Ressetar "The FROC's 35 Years of aid to those  
in military service" The Russian Orthodox Journal March 1977 p. 10
- 44 Ibid. p.10

- 45 Robert L. Gushwa The Best and Worst Times The United States Army  
Chaplaincy 1920 -1945 Volume IV p. 172
- 46 EDITORIAL The Russian Orthodox Journal March 1945, p.2